

# Growing Lithops

Tips for the novice grower

Lithops are a genus of succulent plants that come from South Africa. The keys to growing them successfully are all based on respecting their growth cycle and the growing conditions in the areas from where they naturally occur.

Lithops grow in very dry areas of South Africa and are adapted to survive in those conditions. Most novice growers end up killing plants by providing conditions that are more suited for tropical plants. Lithops thrive in bright sunlight but do appreciate protection from full exposure during mid day and late afternoon. Shade cloth (30%) or white fiberglass roofing panels should provide enough protection in most areas of Southern California. They also do best when grown in a well ventilated environment. Long term exposure to humid, stagnant air is a sure fire method for killing them.

Watering is one of the biggest questions for newer growers. Most see the plants as cute and fragile but when they are pampered as such they grow weak and die. Remember they come from very dry regions and are adapted to those conditions, not soil that is kept constantly moist. Water them and then let them dry almost completely before watering again. If it takes more than 5 to 7 days for the soil to dry out they should be planted in a mix that dries faster or moved to an area with better ventilation that will cause them to dry faster. Lithops also do well with a quick spray for watering rather than a deep soaking that most plants seem to prefer.

Soil mix used for Lithops should be coarse. Ideally the mix should be mostly dry again about 4 days after watering. Add pumice or perlite to commercially available potting soil to speed drainage.

Lithops require a period of about 4 months with NO WATER\* to cause them to shed their old leaves. The dry period begins after the plants flower in late Autumn. Some species will flower sooner than others but it is flowering that is the most obvious signal that the dry period should soon begin. Once the old leaves dry watering can begin again and the new leaves will quickly plump up. Again, let the old leaves dry, then resume watering in late spring.

Lithops may be transplanted all year long. Even flowering plants can be repotted if done carefully.

The Lithops calendar:

**January-April** The dry period

For most species this will be the period where the old leaves dry and the new leave emerge. Sometimes referred to as a dormant period but there is a lot going on unseen. The plants are actually transferring their stored moisture from the old leaves to the new. No watering is needed during this period until the old leaves dry out.

**May-July** Main period of growth

Water regularly and allow to dry before watering again.

**August-September** More growth, dormant if very hot.

Continue watering as before. Flower buds will begin to emerge on some species.

**October-December** Flowering and start of dry period

Flowering occurs for most species. Continue watering until flowers dry and seed pod forms. If the plants don't flower then just stop watering some time in November.

Young plants, those less than 1/2 inch diameter, are grown year-round. No dry period until after the first time they flower or get bigger than 1/2 inch.

More info can be found at <http://www.sgvcss.com/communique/COMMUNIQUE-October.pdf>

and [www.lithops.info](http://www.lithops.info)

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